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SUBJECT: ASEAN SUMMIT: SINGAPORE KEEPS FINGERS CROSSED

Classified By: CDA Daniel Shields for Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Singapore is guardedly optimistic the Thai-hosted December 15-18 ASEAN Summit will go well, despite Thailand's unsettled political situation. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Director for ASEAN William Tan told E/P Counselor November 11 he thought Thai officials would face logistical challenges moving the summit from conference-friendly Bangkok to Chiang Mai, but would benefit from having a relatively light agenda focused mostly on "tying up loose ends" from Singapore's chairmanship year. Tan said Thai officials decided to move the summit because they were "sure" the opposition would have tried to disrupt a Bangkok-based summit.

¶2. (C) Tan expressed concern that the Thai King has not yet signed off on the ASEAN Charter, the full ratification of which ASEAN hopes to celebrate at the Summit. Referring to the Thai parliament's passage of ratifying legislation in September, Tan was unsure why the legislation had not yet secured the King's approval and said that a decision will have to be made soon on whether to schedule a rollout ceremony. Other than approval from the King, the Charter only awaits signatures from the Presidents of Indonesia and the Philippines, both of which Tan expected to be routine. Expressing sympathy for the challenges facing his Thai MFA colleagues, Tan said all summit documents have been drafted but, owing to Thailand's political situation, now must obtain clearance through the Thai parliament.

¶3. (SBU) Otherwise, discussion of the economic crisis will likely be the dominant theme at the summit, Tan said. ASEAN hopes to organize a meeting with the heads of the World Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the margins of the Summit that might also include East Asia Summit (EAS) leaders. Tan noted that the leaders would also meet with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on December 18. (Note: The ASEAN Summit, ASEAN Plus Three and the East Asia Summit will all be held consecutively in Chiang Mai December 15-18. End Note.)

US ELECTION RAISES ASEAN HOPES  
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¶4. (SBU) Tan said his ASEAN colleagues were very optimistic about US-ASEAN ties following the election of Barack Obama as U.S. President. Southeast Asians are hopeful that the President-elect's personal experiences in the region will incline him to engage strongly with ASEAN.

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